

**SECRET**  
NOFORN

10 August 1977

## INTERAGENCY ASSESSMENT OF THE ETHIOPIAN-SOMALI SITUATION

### I. CURRENT SITUATION ON THE GROUND

1. The Somalis have succeeded beyond our, and very likely their own, expectations in forcing the Ethiopian military forces and civil authorities to withdraw from virtually all the military and administrative centers in the lowland Ogaden area, except for Jijiga. The Somali strategy has evolved in three phases: a major step-up in guerrilla activity in mid-July, preceded by the cutting of the Addis Ababa - Djibouti railway at the beginning of June; the introduction of regular Somali forces, including armor and aircraft, beginning about 23 July, to overcome the major concentrations of Ethiopian forces in the flatland area; an assault, which appears to be starting now, to invest and if possible seize the major Ethiopian centers in the north--Jijiga first, and, farther into the hills, Direedawa and Harar. The Somalis now say they hope to accomplish this within the month, although their original timetable reportedly did not call for completion of this phase until October.

2. The Somalis have also built up their guerrilla forces, with assistance from some regulars, in Bale and Sidamo provinces of southern Ethiopia (this movement produced the clashes between Somali and Kenya forces in late June); it appears that these elements are now increasing their operations, although regular units have not yet crossed the border here as far as we know. The regulars will in all likelihood go into action during the next few weeks if they are needed.

3. We believe that the Somalis intend to continue fighting until they are satisfied that they can withstand a serious counteroffensive in this region and that they have gained the main political symbols of a Somali Ogaden. The capture of Jijiga and the neutralization (better yet,

NI M 77-019

**SECRET**  
NOFORN

of course, capture) of Direedawa and Harar for military reasons, and the occupation of Harar and Direedawa for both military and political reasons, would satisfy this condition as far as territorial successes are concerned. Without these bases the Ethiopians would find it extremely difficult to launch a ground counteroffensive against the Somalis. The loss or neutralization of the airfield at Direedawa would also make unlikely a successful airstrike against Somalia by Ethiopia unless the Ethiopians acquire more modern longer range aircraft than they now have, although Somali forces in the Ogaden could still be reached by Ethiopian air strikes.

4. The operations against Jijiga, and particularly against the large population centers of Direedawa and Harar, will not be as easy, however, as those against more outlying garrisons have been. Jijiga is down in the plain, where Somali armor can operate, with relatively good access to logistical support. Direedawa is less exposed than Jijiga, but still vulnerable to attack by armored forces. Harar, on the other hand, lies in the hills in broken terrain which provides good cover for guerrilla sabotage and interdiction operations but which is poor tank country.

5. We do not have precise evidence, but we believe that while the operations so far have put a substantial strain on Somalis' logistics, the Somalis feel that their logistic situation is still superior to that of the Ethiopians, and that they therefore can carry forward the operations they are contemplating. We strongly suspect that the present Somali quest for additional supplies of weapons and ammunition has behind it a longer term concern to obtain both equipment and allies against the possibility of an Ethiopian counteroffensive.

6. From what we have seen of the Ethiopian performance, we believe that the Ethiopians' morale, logistic, and command problems are so severe that they will not be able to use the three remaining major centers in the Ogaden as bases for a serious counterattack, and are likely to lose at least Jijiga, probably Direedawa, and possibly Harar as well. In the light of this, we also believe that a major Ethiopian counteroffensive to retake the

~~SECRET~~

NOFORN

Ogaden is not likely before the end of the year. The Ethiopian Third Division, the unit defending the Ogaden, probably is no longer an effective force for offensive purposes. Although the Ethiopians have other major units, either in training or deployed in northern Ethiopia, we believe they could affect the situation only marginally in the months immediately ahead.

## II. SOMALI AND ETHIOPIAN OBJECTIVES AND CAPABILITIES

7. The general Somali objective is to establish in the Ogaden a Somali-dominated administration that will, at an appropriate time, "request" that it become part of a larger Somali nation. We would expect this evolution to take place before the end of the year, unless the military situation is reversed in a way we do not foresee. We do not believe that the Somalis will wish to announce any particular geographical line as the border of the new entity; they will certainly prefer to keep their options open for the negotiations to which they hope ultimately to bring the Ethiopians. In practice, however, we would expect the Somalis to establish outposts only a fairly short distance up into the highlands in the northern Ogaden region because their ethnic support thins out as the altitude rises. In the south, guerrilla forces that include a large number of non-Somali ethnics, especially the southern Galla who have a long history of resistance to central government control, are attempting to gain control of parts of Bale and Sidamo provinces not a part of the Ogaden. Mogadiscio may be planning to use this territory as a bargaining chip, should Addis Ababa attempt to mount a counterattack in the Ogaden.

8. We believe that the Somalis can defend such an area, stretching from Aysha to Moyale (see map) for at least several months. Ultimately, however, if Communist aid is effective in rebuilding Ethiopia's military capacities, the Somalis' situation will become more vulnerable. The events we are witnessing have been made possible by the revolution in Ethiopia and the disarray that has accompanied it; time is required both for the recovery of military morale, especially a recovery of confidence by field commanders that they will be supported from Addis Ababa in effective and timely fashion, and for the

~~SECRET~~

**SECRET**

NOFORN

organization, equipment, and political indoctrination needed to produce a reliable military machine. The immediate expedient of the levee en masse that Mengistu has turned to is not likely to be of much use against as relatively well organized a force as that which the Somalis have fielded.

9. The Ethiopian strategy, then, is to buy time, holding as well and as much as possible but fundamentally looking to a future when the country's superior resources and manpower reserves can be brought to bear. Diplomatic, technical, and material assistance are required to support this strategy, and the recent Ethiopian approaches to the US, despite the Ethiopians' basic reliance on the Soviets, are indicative of a sense that all possibilities must be canvassed.

10. While in a sense this situation and outlook should call for some kind of negotiation, we doubt that this will be the course that Ethiopia will follow. For Ethiopia, meaningful negotiation under present circumstances means admitting defeat or at least the legitimacy of Somali claims. For Somalia, there is no point to negotiation that involves compromise: the Somalis are in possession of the territory and are enforcing long-held claims; it only remains for the Ethiopians to recognize these claims.

11. Our judgment of these attitudes depends, of course, on the evolution of the military situation along the general lines we have sketched. Were the Somalis to suffer a serious reverse, they would be more amenable to a cease-fire and possibly serious negotiation. But in those circumstances, one would lose the Ethiopians because their hopes would have been revived.

### III. THE SOVIET FACTOR

12. Although the ideological bent of both the Ethiopian and Somali governments doubtless influenced Moscow's initial decisions to support them, Soviet policy toward both countries depends primarily on the need of both parties for Soviet military supply and resupply. The Soviets apparently calculate that no Western power will be

**SECRET**

SECRET

NOFORN

prepared to underwrite Somali efforts to seize the Ogaden and that as long as they remain willing to arm both sides in the conflict, they will be unlikely to lose significantly in either country regardless of the outcome.

13. Over the long term the Soviets may favor the kind of vision that Castro conjured up before the Somali and Ethiopian leaders last spring: a socialist confederation that would be the central power in Northeast Africa and would project its influence into southwestern Arabia and into the Indian Ocean. However, neither the Soviets nor the Africans concerned consider this to be a near-term possibility.

14. Presently, the Soviets are worried that the repercussions of Ethiopia's setbacks in the Ogaden, coupled with difficulties in Eritrea, may be sufficient to topple Chairman Mengistu and thus endanger the "socialist course" of the Ethiopian revolution. Moscow is exerting considerable diplomatic pressure on Somalia to stop fighting and start talking and is urging other Middle Eastern countries to do the same. The Soviets, however, are realistic about the prospects for a successful mediation attempt and they are unwilling to exert the kind of pressure on Somalia that might force it to the negotiating table against its own wishes.

15. We believe that the Soviets will continue to deliver on military supplies they have agreed to send to Somalia, but that they may stand back from new commitments. We think they will also fulfill the commitments they have made to Ethiopia. If Mengistu's situation becomes more desperate and he appears in danger of being toppled, Moscow might be tempted to tilt more obviously in Ethiopia's direction, but we think that in the end Moscow will acquiesce in Somalia's seizure of the Ogaden. The Soviets realize that Ethiopia doubtless will seek to secure the return of the Ogaden as soon as it is militarily capable, but they may hope that in the interim they will be able to effect an acceptable compromise between the two sides.

SECRET

**SECRET**  
NOFORN

16. The risk in this policy, of course, is that of underestimating the strength and depth of ethnic/nationalist feeling in the two countries. There is already evidence that Soviet efforts to bring about negotiation have aroused resentment and suspicion in both Mogadiscio and Addis Ababa. More fundamentally, Somalia's and Ethiopia's respective associations with the Soviets are not bringing the benefits that each government feels it had a right to expect from the relationship. The Somalis thought they were buying Soviet support against a US-allied Ethiopia; they did not envision a Soviet-allied Ethiopia, and this development undercuts the basic rationale for their ties with Moscow. Similarly, the Ethiopians had assumed that their relations with the Soviets would have the effect of restraining, not exciting, Somalia's activities against the Ogaden, but the opposite has so far happened.

17. Our best estimate is that over the next year both Ethiopia and Somalia will modify their relations with the Soviets in recognition of these disappointments, and in this situation the US, other Western countries, and in the case of the Somalis, some of the Arab states, will find opportunities to play larger roles than they now do. But we do not believe, on the basis of the evidence so far and the other developments we can foresee, that either Ethiopia or Somalia will be led to 'break' with the Soviets.

18. In particular, despite the Saudi effort to shift Somalia out of the Soviet relationship, we still doubt any early move by the Somalis to oust the Soviets from the facilities at Berbera although we would expect some gradual constriction on the freedom with which the Soviets make use of these facilities. Siad is, we think, too good a poker player and his skepticism of Western (read US) attitudes too strong to throw away this card. To oust the Soviets from Berbera would likely end the relationship with them; he feels he needs the relationship to keep supplies coming as well as to keep the West interested.

19. On the Ethiopian side, we would expect greater interest in US, and other Western, economic and technical

**SECRET**  
NOFORN

assistance, as a balance to the Soviet/East European/Cuban presence, but barring a real change of regime the Ethiopians will continue to look primarily to the East for help and models in reorganizing and revitalizing their military and political institutions. Disillusion with the Soviets is more likely to make them look elsewhere among the socialist countries than to the West, at this stage.

#### IV. ADDENDUM RE DJIBOUTI

20. We see no fundamental change in the situation regarding Djibouti as a result of current developments in the Ethiopian-Somali situation. There is, however, evidence of growing tension and concern within the Djibouti government, especially over Ethiopian attitudes. Ethiopia believes that Djibouti is coming increasingly under Somali influence, and there is a chance that the Ethiopians may activate subversive and terrorist assets in Djibouti. There is little that the Ethiopians can do directly with regular military forces.